



**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**Planning Division**

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**City of Yakima Planning Commission  
PUBLIC HEARING/STUDY SESSION**

**City Hall Council Chambers**

**Thursday May 16, 2013**

**2:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

**YPC Members:**

**Chair Ben Shoval, Co-Chair Dave Fonfara, Ron Anderson, Al Rose,  
Scott Clark, Paul Stelzer, Bill Cook**

**City Planning Staff:**

**Steve Osguthorpe, Community Development Director/Planning Manager; Bruce Benson, Supervising Planner; Jeff Peters and Joseph Calhoun, Associate Planners; Chris Wilson, Assistant Planner; and Rosalinda Ibarra, Administrative Assistant**

**Agenda**

**Announcement: This meeting is a study session on the City's Master Program in which the general public is invited to participate and comment.**

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Roll Call**
- III. General Audience Participation Not Associated with an Item on the Agenda**
- IV. Public Hearing:**
  - Text Amendment: New Section 15.09.210 Special Requirements for Retaining Walls**
- V. Shoreline Master Program Review:**
  - Staff Distribution of Shoreline Materials**
  - Task#1 – Review Section 17.05.020 Environmental Protection**
  - Task#2 – Review Section 17.05.030 Shoreline Vegetation Conservation**
  - Task#3 – Review Section 17.09.030 Fish and Wildlife Habitat and the Stream Corridor System**
  - Task#4 – Review Section 17.050.060 Flood Hazard Reduction**
  - Task#5 – Review Section 17.07.030 Boating and Private Moorage Facilities**
  - Task#6 – Review Section 17.07.150 Shoreline Stabilization**
  - Task#7 – Review Remaining Sections of 17.09 Critical Areas**
  - Follow-up: Questions or Concerns Regarding Previous Edits and Changes**
- VI. Other Business**
- VII. Adjourn to May 22, 2013**

## **CITY OF YAKIMA PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT**

**TO:** City of Yakima Planning Commission

**FROM:** Steve Osguthorpe, AICP  
Community Development Director

**SUBJECT:** Zoning Code Text Amendments Pertaining to Retaining Walls

**FOR MEETING OF:** May 16, 2013

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### **ISSUE:**

The City has been in the process of addressing some retaining wall issues that came about when a wall built behind lots on the south side of Skyline Way failed. The wall was later replaced, but the replacement wall has had similar structure problems and is currently being reviewed for structural soundness. The structural integrity of the wall has been of great concern to downhill property owners, but no less than the visual impacts the replacement wall has had on their properties. The wall is made of stacked ecology blocks that may be found to have similar visual characteristics as the large Jersey barriers often used along highways. While the blocks have a pattern of smaller blocks molded into their face, the pattern is somewhat superficial. It does not visually diminish the size of the larger blocks because the seams of the actual blocks are clearly discernible from the seams of the artificial molded blocks.

Retaining walls are used throughout the City. Some have been similarly controversial while others have been successfully incorporated into their settings. Examples of walls that would likely be considered more aesthetically pleasing include: a wall made of mortared natural stone on North 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue; a wall of stacked basalt stone on Greystone Court; a wall of stacked manufactured stone on Castlevale at Triple Crown Way; and keystone walls along multiple properties on North 74<sup>th</sup> Avenue. (See attached photos). The defining characteristic of these walls is that they are made of components that provide a consistent, more natural pattern and texture to the wall face. These are in distinct contrast to the wall behind Skyline Way made of the larger ecology blocks, which create an almost clumsy stacking pattern that emphasizes the larger size of the blocks. Some people may find these blocks to be more industrial in appearance.

There are nonetheless products that are made of larger blocks that do stack in a manner that makes the actual seams and the artificial seams pretty much indistinguishable and/or that provide similar visual characteristics as natural or cut stone. The Redi-Rock retaining wall system is a good example of this. The use of timber is also a commonly accepted retaining wall system that is found in many residential and commercial applications.

While walls of any material can be designed for structural soundness, the issue addressed with this proposal is an aesthetic issue. The only way to ensure that retaining walls will not be visually intrusive or out of character with abutting development is to develop standards that address the design characteristics of retaining walls. In response to expressed concerns of abutting property owners, staff has drafted the following standards that would apply to all walls exceeding six feet in height in residential zones and on commercially developed property. They would apply only to those walls that are within 75 feet of abutting property as measured from the bottom or toe of the wall. The standards would be adopted as Section 15.09.210 of the zoning code.

## **PROPOSED TEXT.**

### *15.02.020 – Definitions*

. . .

*“Retaining Wall” means a wall made of wood, stone, cement, steel or other products intended to support, retain or stabilize earthen or gravelly materials at either natural or finished grade.*

. . .

### *15.09.210 – Special Requirements for Retaining Walls.*

*Retaining walls exceeding 6 feet in height, or retaining walls that are part of a stepped or terraced series of walls located closer than 15 feet from each other at any point, and that collectively exceed 8 feet in height, are subject to the following standards:*

- a. Decorative Block Option: Retaining walls shall be constructed of, or faced with, individual blocks no larger than 8” high x 24” wide; or*
- b. Larger Decorative Block Option: Retaining walls shall be constructed of, or faced with, decorative blocks of any size that are molded to provide the visual appearance of the block sizes in Option “a”, provided that actual seams of the larger blocks are indiscernible from the molded seams; or*
- c. Stone Option: Retaining walls shall be constructed of, or faced with, natural stone or faux stone of any dimension, provided that faux stone is designed and colored to have the appearance of natural stone; or*
- d. Timber Option: Retaining walls shall be constructed of, or faced with, treated timber; or*
- e. Landscape Option: Retaining walls shall be landscaped with vines, espaliers, shrubs and/or trees that screen at least 75% of the wall surface within 3 years of growth. Landscaping shall be located on-site and within 4 feet of the face of the wall. Landscaping shall include an automatic irrigation system, and shall be maintained throughout the life of the wall.*
- f. Retaining walls are exempt from these standards when:*
  - a. The toe or downhill footing of the retaining wall is located more than 75 feet from any property line or street right-of-way line.*
  - b. They are not part of a residential, commercial or professional office site development.*

**CONSISTENCY WITH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**

The staff is unaware of any goals or policies of the comprehensive plan that are inconsistent with, or that do not support adoption of, the proposed zoning text amendments pertaining to retaining walls.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

After review of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the agency, the City of Yakima has determined this proposal will not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment. A DNS was therefore issued for this proposal on April 30, 2013. The DNS does not become final until the end of the appeal period. The deadline for appealing the SEPA determination is May 14, 2013. The public may comment on the SEPA determination at the May 16, 2013 meeting.

**PUBLIC NOTICE AND FEEDBACK:**

Notice of the proposed amendments was published in the Yakima Herald on April 7, 2013, and was sent to the State Department of Commerce on April 8, 2013. To date written comments (attached) have been received from the following individuals:

- a. Joe Walsh of Central Washington Home Builders Association. Mr. Walsh expressed concern over the merit of the proposed amendments, and whether they would preclude certain types of materials that may be superior in performance to those specified in the draft language. Staff met with Mr. Walsh, who provided picture examples of the types of materials that would be excluded under the proposed language, including a product made by Redi-Rock. He also questioned the use of timbers in retaining walls. Staff agreed that both treated timbers and the Redi-Rock product would comply with the intent of the proposed language, and amended the text to ensure that such products would be permitted under the proposed standards.
- b. Mike Dooley, Branch Manager of Wilbert Precast Yakima. Mr. Dooley offered similar comments as Mr. Walsh, expressing concern that the proposed language would preclude the use of the Redi-Rock product he markets. Again staff agreed with the comments and amended the text to ensure that his and similar products to his would be permitted under the proposed standards.

**PLANNING COMMISSION OPTIONS:**

The Commission can act in accordance with one of the following options:

1. Make a motion to recommend to the City Council adoption of the proposed amendments as drafted.
2. Make a motion to recommend to the City Council adoption of the proposed amendments with modifications.
3. Make a motion to recommend that the City Council not adopt the proposed amendments and retain the status quo.
4. Make a motion to refer the matter back to staff for additional information.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff finds that there are no inconsistencies between the proposed text and adopted comprehensive plan policies. Staff believes that the proposed amendments would address the expressed aesthetic concerns related to retaining walls, which could help to protect property values. However, this is a policy matter that will ultimately be the decision of policy makers. Staff recommends that the Commission hold the public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council based upon feedback of the public and Commission's collective analysis of this issue.

/s/ Steve Osguthorpe  
Steve Osguthorpe, AICP  
Community Development Director

05/16/2013  
Date